

## TOWARDS A FEMINIST POETICS BY ELAINE SHOWALTER

1. **Elaine Showalter** (1941–), an American critic, is a professor at Princeton University.
2. **Gynocriticism** focuses on recovering neglected women writers and their textual meaning.
3. Showalter's 1977 essay introduced **gynocritics** in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness."
4. Feminist criticism has two modes: **woman as reader** (androcentric texts) and woman as writer (gynocentric texts).
5. **Feminist critique** examines women as readers of male-produced literature.
6. **Gynocritics** studies women as writers, focusing on their history, themes, and genres.
7. In 1977, **Leon Edel**'s essay dramatizes three male scholars debating at the British Museum.
8. The scholars are **Criticus, Poeticus, and Plutarchus**, representing intellectual, reviewer, and biographer roles.
9. An **auburn-haired American woman**, possibly a feminist critic, arrives by taxi but is not invited to debate.
10. The woman, dubbed **Critica**, works diligently inside while men gossip outside.
11. **Feminist criticism** in the 1970s is the most isolated and least understood approach.
12. English scholars oppose **feminist criticism** without reading it, knowing terms like *clinamen*.
13. Critics misread feminist texts through **stereotypes**, as seen in Robert Partlow's caricature.
14. **Partlow** imagines feminist criticism as ludicrous propaganda obsessed with phallic symbols.
15. **Robert Boyers** attacks feminist criticism for lacking intellectual honesty and rigor.
16. Boyers cites Joan Mellen's **Women and Their Sexuality** as deficient in critical rigor.
17. Boyers defines feminist criticism as **demanding ideological answers** for evaluation.
18. Boyers' reckless article led to **libel charges** and a Partisan Review retraction.

19. **Rigor** in Boyers' critique is a severe act to force women into academic discourse.
20. The lack of **articulated theory** makes feminist criticism vulnerable to attacks.
21. **Radical feminists** view methodology as a patriarchal tool limiting women's questions.
22. **George Eliot's Casaubon** satirizes male precision as impotent structuralism.
23. **Mr. Ramsay** in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* is a self-pitying philosopher.
24. **Professor Bloodrot** in Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* lectures on female swan orgasms.
25. Women reject Bloodrot's **self-deception**, leaving his lecture one by one.
26. Adrienne Rich critiques **rationality** for ignoring nonrational elements in *Of Woman Born*.
27. Mary Daly calls methodology a **tyrannical methodolatry** erasing women's questions.
28. Daly's **God Method** classifies women's experiences as nondata under patriarchy.
29. **Women's studies** in 300 U.S. colleges fear academic cooption in the 1970s.
30. Feminist presses resist **assimilation**, valuing activism and empiricism.
31. Women traditionally play **supporting roles** as translators and editors in scholarship.
32. Male critics like **Geoffrey Hartman** openly contest with writers, citing pen-envy.
33. Women are urged to work for **Shakespeare's sister**, per Woolf's 1928 exhortation.
34. Feminist criticism is a **major contribution** to English studies and interdisciplinary work.
35. **Feminist critique** probes stereotypes, omissions, and male literary history.
36. It examines **female audience exploitation** in popular culture and film.
37. Feminist critique analyzes **woman-as-sign** in semiotic systems.
38. **Gynocritics** focuses on women's psychodynamics, language, and literary careers.
39. The term **gynocritique** is adapted from French to describe women's writing discourse.
40. **Feminist critique** is political, tied to Marxist sociology and aesthetics.
41. **Gynocritics** is experimental, linked to new feminist research modes.

42. **Carolyn Heilbrun** compares feminist critique to the Old Testament, seeking past errors.
43. **Catharine Stimpson** likens gynocritics to the New Testament, seeking imagination's grace.
44. Both critique and gynocritics are **necessary** for feminist liberation.
45. Heilbrun notes a **high moral tone** in discussing feminist criticism.
46. In **The Mayor of Casterbridge**, Henchard sells his wife and daughter for five guineas.
47. **Irving Howe** praises the sale scene as appealing to male fantasy.
48. Howe describes Susan as a **drooping rag**, ignoring her constrained role.
49. A woman reader sees Susan as **not passive**, limited by womanhood and motherhood.
50. Henchard sells his **female child**, symbolizing rejection of the female community.
51. **Patriarchal societies** sell daughters, not sons, per Hardy's emphasis.
52. Hardy revised to have Henchard sell **one daughter** for clarity.
53. Henchard chooses the **male code** of paternity, money, and contract.
54. His tragedy is the **inadequacy** of the male system and lost female bonds.
55. The emotional center is Henchard's appreciation of **Elizabeth-Jane's** strength.
56. **Elizabeth-Jane** follows her heart until taught to value legality by Henchard.
57. Henchard, a **woman-hater**, is humbled by his virile façade's collapse.
58. Hardy's women are **idealized projections** of a repressed male self.
59. **Feminist critique** is male-oriented, focusing on men's views of women.
60. It requires apprenticeship to **male theoreticians** like Althusser or Lacan.
61. This **apprenticeship** resists questioning male theories' boundaries.
62. Feminist critique **naturalizes victimization**, making it an obsessive topic.
63. **Elizabeth Hardwick** distinguishes betrayed women like Hetty from betrayers like Hester Prynne.

64. Hardwick's distinctions risk **celebrating victimization** as opportunity.
65. **Gynocritics** constructs a female framework for women's literature analysis.
66. Gynocritics focuses on **female experience**, rejecting male literary models.
67. It parallels ethnography, rendering the **muted female half** of society.
68. Gynocritics connects to feminist research in **history, anthropology, psychology**.
69. Anthropologists study women's **relationships, sexuality, rites** in subcultures.
70. **Michelle Rosaldo** notes women use symbolic conceptions for solidarity.
71. Women's literature **undermines masculine systems** with feminine values.
72. Women engage **Amazon myths** in Victorian poetry to contemporary sci-fi.
73. **Carroll Smith-Rosenberg** outlines the homosocial world in women's letters.
74. **Nancy Cott** explores cultural bondage and sisterly solidarity in *The Bonds of Womanhood*.
75. **Ann Douglas** links sentimental literature to American mass culture's genesis.
76. **Nina Auerbach** seeks female bonds in women's literature, from Alcott to Spark.
77. **English women's studies** need archival research for historical and literary insights.
78. **Virginia Woolf** urges elasticity in studying women writers' conditions.
79. **Elizabeth Barrett Browning's** feminism in *Aurora Leigh* is romantic and bourgeois.
80. **Cora Kaplan** ties Barrett Browning to Tennyson, Clough, and Christian Socialism.
81. Kaplan omits **Robert Browning's** influence on Barrett Browning's work.
82. Women writers face **internal conflicts** balancing male approval and their own work.
83. Barrett Browning was **more famous** than Robert in the early 1850s.
84. Her **miscarriages** and child-rearing slowed *Aurora Leigh's* progress.
85. **Florence Nightingale** in *Cassandra* sees suffering as feminist awakening.
86. Nightingale demands **restoration of suffering** over indifferentism for progress.

87. Women's novel heroines often **drown** rather than discover new worlds.
88. **George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver** dies, unable to fit her desired role.
89. **Edith Wharton's Lily Bart** faces contingencies leading to death.
90. **Olive Schreiner's Lyndall** cannot become the woman she wishes.
91. **Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier** dies rather than struggles in an unfit world.
92. **Female suffering** becomes a literary commodity consumed by both genders.
93. **Rebecca West** sees unhappiness as the keynote of English women's fiction.
94. **Fay Weldon** portrays suicide as a domestic task in *Down Among the Women*.
95. **Muriel Spark's Lise** in *The Driver's Seat* seeks her killer in suffragette colors.
96. Lise's **death-dress** reflects feminine wisdom of identity through clothes and men.
97. **Annette Kolodny** argues women's fictional worlds may be real and justifiable.
98. Women's literature must transcend **compromise, madness, death**.
99. **Adrienne Rich** in *Song* links loneliness to feminist awakening.
100. Rich's **Of Woman Born** challenges mother-daughter alienation under patriarchy.
101. **Matrophobia**, fear of becoming one's mother, marks 1950s–60s feminist literature.
102. **Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar** targets the mother with contempt for recovery.
103. 1970s literature seeks the **mother**, as in Atwood's *Surfacing* and Alther's *Kinflicks*.
104. The **death of the mother** is a profound rite in female literature.
105. **Fanny Fern** saw the novel as therapy for women's stifled lives in 1867.
106. Fern urged women to **write** to shock male indifference, not please.
107. **Elizabeth Robins** argued women writers echoed male fables for approval.
108. Women avoided exploring **female consciousness** due to male publishers.
109. **Women Writers Suffrage League** fought male-dominated publishing.

110. **Victoria Press** in the 1870s began women's publishing houses.
111. **Virginia Woolf** saw economic independence as key to women's art.
112. Woolf believed women's literature held a **precious specialty** of female vision.
113. Feminist criticism in the **1960s and 1970s** emphasizes historical awareness.
114. Reconstructing the **female tradition** requires rediscovering obscured women writers.
115. Studying **150 sister novelists** reveals patterns in female literary evolution.
116. Showalter's **A Literature of Their Own** outlines Feminine, Feminist, Female phases.
117. The **Feminine phase** (1840–1880) imitated male intellectual achievements.
118. Feminine phase writers used **male pseudonyms** to cope with double standards.
119. American women used **superfeminine pseudonyms** like Fanny Fern.
120. **Harriet Parr** as "Holme Lee" encoded domestic femininity in her pseudonym.
121. Feminine art's feminist content is **oblique and subversive**, read between the lines.
122. The **Feminist phase** (1880–1920) rejected femininity to protest wronged womanhood.
123. **New Women** in the 1880s saw responsibility to suffering sisters.
124. **Amazon utopias** of the 1890s protested male laws and systems.
125. **Charlotte Perkins Gilman** envisioned feminist literature as sisterly collectivity.
126. Gilman's **beehive metaphor** emphasizes motherhood and social service.
127. The **Female phase** (since 1920) draws on female experience for autonomous art.
128. **Dorothy Richardson and Woolf** divided work into masculine and feminine forms.
129. Woolf's **luminous halo** metaphor suggests uterine withdrawal in female art.
130. **A Room of One's Own** becomes a solitary Amazon utopia for Woolf.
131. Feminist criticism revises **Marxism and structuralism** to include gender.
132. Feminist criticism must **emancipate itself** from male models, per John Stuart Mill.

133. **Marxism** sees authors as producers of historically determined texts.
134. **Structuralism** offers a grammar of genre through linguistic models.
135. The **Cold War and Sputnik** era boosted scientific literary criticism in the 1950s.
136. **Northrop Frye's** *Anatomy of Criticism* sought scientific literary qualities.
137. Sciences are seen as **male, aggressive**, humanities as female and narcissistic.
138. New criticisms like **deconstructionism** assert virile professionalism.
139. Literary science creates an **elite corps** prioritizing theory over books.
140. A **two-tiered system** divides higher (form) and lower (content) criticism.
141. Higher criticism takes **male identity**, lower criticism a female one.
142. Feminists like **Hélène Cixous** risk marginalization in academic ghettos.
143. Feminist criticism asserts the **authority of experience**, not just emotion.
144. Women's experience risks becoming **mute** in Marxist or structuralist frameworks.
145. Feminist criticism seeks **repressed messages** in history and anthropology.
146. The theoretical **impasse** stems from critics' divided consciousness.
147. Critics are **daughters of male tradition** and sisters in the women's movement.
148. The male tradition demands **rationality and marginality**, the movement revolution.
149. Showalter's 1976 title was **Visiting Minority Professor** at the University of Delaware.
150. The **Professor** in Showalter studies major works impartially.
151. The **Minority** seeks connections between life and work, challenging norms.
152. Neither **Professor nor Minority** can exist alone without betrayal.
153. Feminist critics need a **new language** integrating intelligence and experience.
154. Showalter invites **Criticus, Poeticus, Plutarchus** to join feminist criticism.
155. **Feminist criticism** is permanent, requiring a lasting home in academia.

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